

VZCZCXRO9531
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHTV #2690/01 2490905
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 060905Z SEP 07
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3153
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002690

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/30/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPPS](#) [PINR](#) [SY](#) [IR](#) [LE](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: DAS DANIN AND IDF INTEL CHIEF MG YADLIN DISCUSS
TENSIONS WITH SYRIA, RISKS OF UNINTENDED WAR

REF: A. TEL AVIV 02688
[B](#). TEL AVIV 02672
[C](#). TEL AVIV 02640

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b)(d).

[1](#). (S) SUMMARY. During a meeting August 30, Israel Defense Intelligence (IDI) Chief MG Amos Yadlin analyzed the ongoing possibility of war with Syria for visiting NEA DAS Robert Danin. While tensions have eased somewhat from their mid-summer high, and while neither side wanted a fight, Yadlin still believed there was a serious risk of war resulting from a Syrian or Israeli miscalculation. Yadlin also described the emerging Syria-Iran-Hizballah axis as a serious threat to Israel and expressed alarm at the extent of military integration the three were undergoing. Yadlin agreed with DAS Danin that the survival of the democratic process in Lebanon was important, but said Israel was more preoccupied with immediate threats such as Iran, Syria, Hamas, Hizballah and Al-Qaeda. END SUMMARY.

Chronology of Tensions

[1](#)2. (S) DAS Danin asked whether Israeli thinking had changed on the possibility of a near-term war with Syria, noting the steady flow of war speculation appearing in the Israeli and Syrian press over recent months. Yadlin responded by describing the sequence of events that led to the heightened fear of war. He said that in the spring of 2006, the GOI first began to notice Syrian officials using the word "resistance" -- a loaded and powerful concept in Arabic -- in their comments about reclaiming the Golan Heights. He described how tensions continued to mount during and immediately after the summer war with Hizballah, as the SARG began to think it could succeed in a war with Israel by adopting the "Hizballah model" of targeting civilian centers while luring the IDF into a guerilla-style ground campaign in the Golan. However, by the end of 2006, Yadlin said, the SARG "began to realize that it needed to slow down," because as a territorial state with fixed targets, it had much more to lose than Hizballah in any war with Israel. "But then the Russians got involved," he said, "by spreading information that the U.S. would attack Iran in the summer of 2007." Reflecting the shared view of most Israeli commentators, Yadlin said he thought the Russians had deliberately lied to Bashar Assad in order to sell more weapons to Syria and to reassert Russia's role in regional geopolitics. Shortly after the Russian intervention, Yadlin said, the GOI received "very good intelligence" indicating that the SARG had decided "there would be war in the summer because the U.S. would attack Iran." As a result, the SARG accelerated its military training exercises in order to be ready for war with Israel by June 1, although that target later slipped to August 31. At his point, the worst of the tensions seemed to have passed, he concluded.

Prisoner's Dilemma

13. (S) DAS Danin asked whether the Israelis still foresaw a chance of war with Syria this year. Yadlin replied that while both sides seemed to understand that the other was not interested in war, there remained a serious risk that war could erupt as the result of each side's heightened readiness. "We're in a Prisoner's Dilemma," he said, whereby the first to attack would gain the strategic advantage if it appeared war was likely. In such a situation, there was a high risk of miscalculation resulting in war. Asked by DAS Danin how such a scenario might materialize, Yadlin said there were three triggers that could initiate a war: 1) There could be a "tactical mistake" -- for instance if the IDF attacked a smuggling convoy near the Syria-Lebanon border and the SARG believed that the attack occurred inside Syria; 2) There could be a "strategic miscalculation" resulting from faulty analysis of the other side's intentions; or 3) an "external actor" could push the sides into war through provocation or deception. Still, Yadlin said, the Syrians seemed to recognize they would be in a much better position for war in 2008-2009 (after finishing their military modernization program), and were likely to do what they could to avoid war for the next year or so.

14. (S) DAS Danin asked whether the GOI saw any risk of a limited Syrian strike in the Golan in order to distract attention from the Hariri Tribunal and Syrian meddling in Lebanon. Yadlin said that DefMin Ehud Barak was concerned about exactly that, and was worried the Syrians would attack with "two battalions in the fog of night taking two villages

TEL AVIV 00002690 002 OF 002

in the Golan." However, Yadlin said, while the Syrian military seemed focused on the Golan, the regime itself seemed more concerned about other issues, namely Lebanon, Iraq, U.S. intentions, and above all, survival.

Iran-Syria-Hizballah Axis

15. (S) DAS Danin thanked Yadlin for sending his deputy, IDI Research Division Chief BG Yossi Baidatz, to European capitals to brief governments about the ongoing arms smuggling problem over the Syria-Lebanon border. Danin acknowledged that it was a "hard but necessary" task, and said briefings had helped to ensure a positive UNSCR 1701 report in June. Yadlin said that smuggling remained a serious problem, and reflected a bigger, even more worrying trend whereby Syria, Hizballah and Iran were "aligning as never before." The three have integrated their systems for defense funding, military training and weapons systems, he said. This was a serious problem for Israel because it essentially turned three of Israel's biggest threats into a single, hostile force. Yadlin described his five main threats as, in rank order: 1) Iran, 2) Syria, 3) Hamas, 4) Hizballah, and 5) Al-Qaeda.

Lebanon

16. (S) DAS Danin said that the U.S. was committed to the the survival of the democratic process in Lebanon, and noted that as a result, the U.S. had to worry about the impact on Lebanon of any potential deals between Syria and Israel. Yadlin said the GOI was also interested in the survival of democracy in Lebanon, but noted that compared to the array of threats that Israel was forced to contend with every day, the fate of the Lebanese political system, while important, was of lesser concern.

17. (U) DAS Danin has cleared this message.

Visit Embassy Tel Aviv's Classified Website:

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv>

You can also access this site through the State Department's
Classified SIPRNET website.

JONES